VIReC RESEARCHERS' GUIDE TO VA DATA

Data Issues Brief   September 2004

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1. VIReC Web Site Changed

Users of the VIReC Web site have new tools for finding information about data for VA research. When Beta testing of a revised VIReC Web site ended August 20, the site navigation improved, though major sections of the site continued to be Data Sources by Name, Data Sources by Category, Help, Library, and Information About VIReC. The home page now contains a section of "Quick Links" to the VIReC Research User Guides, *Data Issues Brief*, *VIReC Insights*, FAQs, the Toolkit for New Users of VA Data, and a table tracking changes to the Web site. The Documentation section of the Medical SAS Datasets pages now includes SAS® proc contents for datasets FY1999-FY2003. The "What's New" section of the homepage includes links to the new Research User Guide to DSS Clinical National Data Extracts (in Beta testing), information on VA amputation and prosthetics data, Frequencies of Select Variables from the FY2003Medical SAS Datasets, and the report *Research Findings From the VA Medicare Data Merge Initiative*. Users' comments on these and other changes are welcomed and can be sent to the Webmaster via the Web site at http://www.virec.research.med.va.gov.

2. Latest Report From Gulf War Veterans Information System

The quarterly report for August 2004 from the Gulf War Veterans Information System (GWVIS) is scheduled for release in September. GWVIS provides current summary level data on the Gulf War service member population and their utilization of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. See the reports on the VA Intranet at http://vbaausdsf1.vba.va.gov/owa_dba/owa/gwvis_frame_pkg.first_page.

3. October 6-8, 2004, Workshop on Using Medicare Data for Research

Researchers planning to utilize the VA Medicare data for research may want to attend the workshop "CMS 101, Introduction to the Use of Medicare Data for Research," being held October 6-8, 2004, at the University of Minnesota. This workshop provides important background about the use of Medicare data for researchers. Conducted in a computer-based classroom, the workshop will feature hands-on computer work, lectures and demonstrations, and interactive learning throughout. Students will have their own PC. For full details, see the Web site of the Research Data Assistance Center (ResDAC), http://www.resdac.umn.edu/training/CMS101MN.asp.

4. New Cyber Seminars from ERIC Summer 2004 Course

Two courses from the Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center (ERIC) 2004 Summer Session will be added this fall as Distance Learning/Cyber Courses through the VA Employee Education Service (EES). "Introduction to Epidemiologic Methods" was taught by Thomas D. Koepsell, MD, and Noel S. Weiss, MD, DrPH. "Research In Improving Chronic Illness Care" was taught by Edward H. Wagner, MD, MPH, David McCulloch, MD, FRCP, Mike Von Korff, ScD, and Connie Davis, MN, ARNP. To learn more about Distance Learning/Cyber Courses or sign up for courses, go to http://www.eric.seattle.med.va.gov/education/seattle_eric_cyber.htm. To request a free course brochure, with EES broadcast times, e-mail eric@med.va.gov or call 206-277-3587.

5. VIReC Web Site Has Proc Contents for VHA Medical SAS® Datasets

VIReC documentation of the Medical SAS Datasets has been expanded to include SAS® proc contents for Inpatient Acute Care, Extended Care, Observation Care and Non-VA Care for the years 1999 – 2003 and Outpatient Events and Visits datasets, also for the years 1999 – 2003. This information is available at http://www.virec.research.med.va.gov/DataSourcesName/Medical-SAS-Datasets/SASdocumentation.htm.

6. August-September Issue of *DSS Matters*

The current DSS newsletter contains several announcements of potential interest to researchers. These include approval by Secretary Principi for a DSS User Conference in 2005 (probably March or April), with dates and location to be determined, and revisions to the DSS Web site, including several new reports using National Data Extract (NDE) data. The newsletter is available on the VA Intranet Web site for DSS at http://vaww.dss.med.va.gov.

7. DSS *FY05 Technical Conversion Guidelines Handbook* Released

Researchers utilizing DSS data will be interested in changes being implemented for FY2005. The new conversion guidelines handbook describes new or modified processes for data collection on telemedicine and home telehealth care, dental and pathology products, Department of Defense non-VA care, and Stop Code changes. The handbook is available via the DSS Intranet Web site (http://vaww.dss.med.va.gov).

8. Analysis of VistA Laboratory Application

Researchers utilizing VistA data, especially if extracting VistA data from multiple sites, may find useful information in the new Application Information Book (AIB) for Laboratory released by the Application Modernization Analyst's Office (part of VHA Office of Information Health Systems Design and Development).   The office is studying and documenting VistA applications as a support to OI development teams doing VistA modernization. There is also a previously released AIB for Nutrition and Food Service. For full details, see the Intranet Web site for the Application Modernization Analyst's Office at http://vista.med.va.gov/migration/analysis/index.htm.